

Richard Derby House
Salem, Massachusetts

Essay

HABS No. MASS-269

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Massachusetts

Historic American Buildings Survey
Frank Chouteau Brown, District Officer
76 Chestnut Street, Boston, Mass.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Addendum to
Derby House
Salem Maritime National Historic Site
168 Derby Street
Salem
Essex County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-269

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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM TO
DERBY HOUSE

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Address: Salem Maritime National Historic Site, 168 Derby Street,
Salem, Essex County, Massachusetts.

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Presently owned by the National Park Service, the house is administered by a superintendent with offices in the Custom House, 178 Derby Street. It functions as a completely furnished early American house museum, open all year to the public. A caretaker occupies the third floor rooms and kitchen ell.

Two periods of extensive restoration work have contributed to preserving the Derby House as a good example of an eighteenth century gambrel roof house, generally associated with a date earlier than 1761-62 when it was built. It is the oldest brick house remaining in Salem, an older one having been torn down. The wood stair with carved balusters and newel post, and beveled wall paneling are interesting architectural details. The house is important in connection with early merchant families of Salem, including Elias Hasket Derby (1739-1799), merchant who is reputed to be the first American millionaire and for whom the house was built, Captain Henry Prince, shipmaster and merchant, and William Ropes, merchant. (1)

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The land on which the Derby House sits was purchased in December, 1760, by Captain Richard Derby who was living at the time in a wood gambrel roof house on the corner of Herbsrt and Derby Streets, more recently known as the Miles Ward House. It is believed that he lived there until his death in 1783. It is suggested, therefore, by Messrs. Felt, Phillips and Small that the brick house was built by Richard Derby for his son Elias Hasket Derby in 1761-62.⁽²⁾ Richard Derby never paid taxes on the brick house, however Elias Hasket Derby paid his first taxes on real property in Salem in 1763 when he was charged 12 pounds for "1 homestead (N.W. corner unfinished)." He was taxed for a "House viz 7/8 parts" continually until 1782.⁽³⁾

The major portion of the house was built in 1761 but the roof was not put on until 1762. There are few definitely identifiable records of the construction, and those appear in 1762. A receipt of January 6, 1762, indicates that Daniel Spofford received two pounds and thirteen shillings from Richard Derby for work on the roof of a house 43 ft. long and 27 ft. wide. These dimensions approximate the actual dimensions of the Derby House, 28 ft. 9 in. by 43 ft. 11 in. On May 28, 1762, one John Jones was paid "the sum of three pounds for shillings in full

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for 24 Days Labour on Hasket's House."⁽⁴⁾ When the roof was put on in 1762 it is not known definitely what material was used, however, Mr. Edwin W. Small, former superintendent of Salem Maritime National Historic Site in his article on the Derby House proposes that the original roof may have been slate.⁽⁵⁾

Joseph McIntire, 1716-1776, a housewright of Salem and father of the well known Salem architect Samuel McIntire, may have had something to do with the construction since on May 22, 1762, Richard Derby paid him "the sum of forty shillings cash on account" as "Joseph Mackentire."⁽⁶⁾

No plans are known to exist and the architect and builder other than those mentioned are unknown.

Elias Hasket Derby was paying rent in 1778 for "the Mansion House of Gov. Wm. Browne", so evidently he and his family moved from the brick house in 1777 or 1778. George Nichols, a prominent shipmaster and merchant, was born in the Derby House on July 4, 1778. His family later moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1779.⁽⁷⁾ Henry Prince, a shipmaster for the Derby family, lived in the house next, and appears to have been residing there by 1784 because of a notation in the Derby Papers of a bill of 1784 reading "account of the stuff expended upon Mr. Prince's House and Fence."⁽⁸⁾

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In 1785 Elias Hasket Derby received the lot and residence as part of his share of his father's estate, and in 1796 he conveyed the lot and buildings to Henry Prince for 1,075 pounds.⁽⁹⁾ This transaction was not recorded until January 1, 1801, and shortly after Henry Prince secured a larger frontage on the western boundary of his house. Prince stopped going to sea about 1805 and became a merchant, but Jefferson's embargo and the depression which followed forced him to sell the house on April 9, 1811 to William Ropes, a merchant from Boston. The house was occupied by descendants of the Ropes family until 1873.⁽¹⁰⁾

The kitchen ell was probably added around the time William Ropes took possession of the house in 1811. In the northwest and northeast corner rooms of the first floor woodwork and mantels appear to be of the same time, and since they were probably altered when the kitchen ell was added, it is considered likely that one of these rooms had previously been the kitchen. Mr. Stuart M. Barnette, architect who worked on the restoration of the Derby House, believes that the northwest room was originally the kitchen,⁽¹¹⁾ although no supporting evidence for this view could be found. There is some reason to believe that the northeast room might have been the kitchen, since the brick vaulted foundation in the basement under the northeast room is slightly larger than the others, which indicates that it could have supported a cooking fireplace. There is also evidence in the

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brickwork around the east window of this room that at one time a door opening had been there instead; also as stated earlier the northwest corner of the house was not finished until after 1782. Because of the uncertainty as to which of these two rooms had originally been the kitchen and the lack of evidence of what the room had been like, the decision was made to retain the ell at the time of restoration. An outside door located in the rear hall between the northeast and northwest rooms can still be seen where it was presumably blocked up at the time the ell was added. Stairs located in the hall backed up to the front stair were removed (as indicated by an outline left in the old plaster found in 1928) and a stair in the ell was built to connect the ell to the second floor and also to the cellar.

An example of the original brickwork has been well preserved in the space where the attic of the ell frames into the north wall of the original house. An opening which was blocked up can also be seen there, probably a window which provided light to the rear hall stairway landing.

After 1873 the house was no longer in the hands of the Ropes family and it had a succession of owners. It was in a rundown condition when acquired by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in April of 1927. Restoration work was begun on

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the house in 1928. Repairs were made at that time to paneling and mouldings throughout. Mantels of a later period which were more elaborate in design than the originals were removed from over the fireplace paneling and the original mantels with bolection moulding were revived. Small carpentry jobs were performed such as patching and repairing panels where such things as stovepipes had gone. Paint samples to match the original colors were experimented with. The layers of wall paper were removed down to the original painted plaster walls. Window blinds on the outside which were added at a late date were removed. Door openings between the northeast and southeast rooms, and northwest and southwest rooms had been enlarged and were reduced to their original size. Large window panes had replaced the original 12/12 sash as could be seen in an old photograph, and the original smaller panes were replaced. A wood fence with ball capped finials on the posts was erected. All exterior exposed wood was painted a light green which has since been retained. It was found that one room had dark red paint as though an imitation of mahogany.

Drawings for the work were performed by Alfred F. Shurrocks. The work was under the direction of George Francis Dow.⁽¹²⁾

The Derby House was offered to the Government in March of 1936 and accepted by the Secretary of Interior in December of 1937. It was donated by the S.P.N.E.A. Extensive work was started in 1938

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on restoration of the house under the direction of Stuart M. Barnette, and some of the drawings for the work were prepared by Frank Chouteau Brown.⁽¹³⁾

A set of drawings dated July 25, 1938⁽¹⁴⁾ prepared by Stuart Barnette indicate some of the work performed at that time including replacement of first floor girders and pouring reinforced concrete beams under first floor hearths although no evidence exists in the house of concrete beams, so this part of the work was apparently not done. Roof trusses were repaired, members replaced, bracing added, and the roof was repaired including replacement of much of the sheathing and installation of a new asbestos shingle roof and new flashing. Roof framing members which were replaced were the original timbers put in during 1761-62.⁽¹⁵⁾ Wood gutters and downspouts were removed. Original flooring was revived in the southeast and southwest rooms of the first floor. Elsewhere random width boards of pine similar to the original were installed to replace later narrow flooring. The segmental central dormer window (shown in early photographs, one of 1887 in Essex Institute Photographic Collection) had been changed to a triangular pediment similar to the two side dormers, and had to be restored. New clapboard was also installed on the sides. A new fence was built similar to the one erected by the S.P.N.E.A. except for a granite base instead of wood.⁽¹⁶⁾

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Other work done by the National Park Service included carpentry work performed on the job such as building a new closet door for the southeast second floor room, replacing the threshold at the main entrance, and repairing the large front door. Concealed radiators were installed in closets, supplied from a central heating plant in the Custom House.⁽¹⁷⁾ The original back stair which had been removed from the rear hallway was replaced on evidence found of the outline of the original steps in the old plaster and formed by old and new lath.⁽¹⁸⁾ The cellar stair in the ell was covered over by new flooring, and a new stair to the cellar was built under the main stair where it had been originally located.⁽¹⁹⁾ The stair to the second floor in the kitchen ell was removed.

Two cellar windows in the granite foundation which had been closed were reopened and also the original outside door opening to the cellar on the east, where new granite steps leading to it were also set. Except for the front door hardware, most of the original was missing and was reproduced from remaining fixtures on the site by a blacksmith.⁽²⁰⁾ Badly bulged wall at the rear was removed and replaced.⁽²¹⁾

An extensive study was made of the layers of paint on all painted surfaces, and the original colors were restored along with samples of the succeeding colors in each room. A sample of artificial graining, probably to simulate mahogany was retained on the main panel

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of the dado in the southeast first floor room. A sample of wall-paper of China tea-box pattern was uncovered in the northwest second floor room. It was reproduced in a slightly smaller pattern and applied to the walls of that room.⁽²²⁾ Eight inch tile hearthstones were installed in all first floor rooms.

In 1954 black slate shingles were installed on the lower slopes of the gambrel roof and on the ell, and copper sheeting on the upper slopes of the main roof.

The house is now furnished through loans and gifts with furnishings of the third quarter of the eighteenth century except for a few items either slightly earlier or a very few a little later. Many of the items in the house were given by the late Mrs. Francis B. Crowninshield, whose husband was a descendant of Captain Richard Derby.

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Important Old Views and References

1. Custom House file, memo from E. W. Small for Coordinating Superintendent Francis S. Ronalds states that 125 negatives 4-3/4" x 3-11/16" from Assistant Architect S. M. Barnette were sent to Ronalds March 31, 1941, containing photographic evidence and justification for changes made in restoring details, chiefly at the Derby House and Hawkes House. Some photographic prints of this size are in the Custom House file.
2. Custom House file, two boxes photographic negatives and prints.
3. Essex Institute Photographic Collection including Cousins list no. 259, 1891.
4. Frank Cousins, Phil M. Riley The Colonial Architecture of Salem.
5. See notes.

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Although no historical events of particular significance are known to have taken place in the Derby House, there have been a number of events connected with its owners which have some historic interest.

The first owner of the house, Elias Hasket Derby, pioneered in the trade to the Indies and China in the years after the American Revolution and became America's first millionaire. During the Revolution he owned and fitted out vessels as privateers to prey upon British commerce.

The Quero, one of the vessels of the Derby fleet, carried the first news of the battles at Lexington and Concord to reach England. (23)

Henry Prince, who was the second owner of the house, in the same year he bought the house from Elias Hasket Derby sailed the Derby's Astrea II on the first trading voyage of any American vessel to the Philippine Islands.

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Possible Sources for Additional Information:

1. Diary of Reverend William Bentley, 4 volumes, 1905, 1911, 1914, published by the Essex Institute.
2. Derby Family Papers, 1742-1845, consisting of thirty-four bound volumes and four boxes of letters (Although this source has been used, a more extensive study of these papers might reveal more information about the construction of the House).
3. "Notes on the Derby Houses from the Derby Ledgers", Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. LXIX, (1933).
4. Custom House files. (Further study of these files might uncover additional information about the restoration work and subsequent work under the National Park Service.)
5. Files of Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

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Notes

1. Edwin W. Small, "The Derby House", Old-Time New England, Vol. XLVII, No. 4, Spring 1957, pp 101-107.
See also H. W. Balknap, Pedigreed Properties in Salem No. 41, Essex Institute.
2. a. Joseph B. Felt, Annals of Salem, (1845), Vol. 1, pp 414-415. W. & S. B. Ives, Boston; James Munroe & Co. 1845
b. James D. Phillips, The Life and Times of Richard Derby, p 100, Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1929.
c. Edwin W. Small and Thomas G. Manning, The Derby-Prince-Ropes House, October, 1937, in Custom House File.
3. Town of Salem, Records, Taxes, 1753-1781, Taxes, 1774-1781, cited in 2c.
4. See note 1.
5. Memo. from E. W. Small to Regional Director, National Park Service, March 9, 1954, Custom House File. (Typed)
6. See note 1.
7. Martha Nichols (ed.), A Salem Shipmaster and Merchant, The Autobiography of George Nichols, (1921), p 1.
8. Derby Family Papers, Vol. XXX, Listed among bills, 1780-1789, one dated April 20, 1784.
Cited in 1.
9. Essex County, Southern District, Registry of Deeds, Book 167, 137.
Cited in 2c.
10. See note 2c.
11. Correspondence of Stuart M. Barnette, Architectural Reports and Justifications. Custom House File. (Most letters typed and some longhand)
12. See note 1.
13. Frank Chouteau Brown, Derby House, Committee Inspection, Correspondence, 1939, Custom House File. (Typed on yellow paper, perhaps copies of longhand)

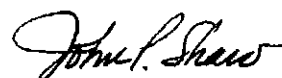
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14. U. S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design, Drawings titled: Restoration for Preservation of Buildings, Grounds & Wharf - Salem, Mass., No. NHS-SAL-1000, (15 sheets), July 25, 1938.
15. Report for Nov. 1938, Custom House File. (Typed)
16. Memo. from Stuart M. Barnette for the Associate Director, Justification for the Inclusion of a Stone Base in the Design for a Fence at the Derby House at Salem, Massachusetts, Custom House File, Sept. 10, 1938.
17. U. S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Engineering, Drawings titled: Central Heating Plant, Custom House, Salem Maritime National Historic Site. No. NHS-SM-5302, (8 sheets), Jan. 10, 1939.
18. U. S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design, Drawings titled: Rear Stairway Detail, Derby House, Salem Maritime National Historic Site, No. NHS-SAL-2006, 1939. See also: Stuart Barnette, Asst. Arch. Justification for Installation of the Design for the Rear Hall Stairway in the Derby House, SMNHS, Custom House File. (No date) (Typed)
19. U. S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design, Drawings titled: Cellar Stair, Derby House, SMNHS, No. NHS-SAL-2008.
20. Letter from Stuart M. Barnette to Frank C. Brown, Architectural Reports and Justifications, Custom House File, Nov. 13, 1939 (Typed)
21. Final Construction Report on FP 706 & OP 752-05-230 SMNHS, Custom House File, Feb. 26, 1941. (Typed)
22. See note 1.
23. James D. Phillips, The Life and Times of Richard Derby, pp 40-43.



Prepared by: John P. Shaw, Sept. 1958

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Built in 1761-62, it is a good example of an eighteenth-century gambrel-roof house and the oldest brick house remaining in Salem. Interior wood paneling and the carved stairway are of particular architectural interest.
2. Condition of fabric: House in good condition due to extensive restoration in 1928 by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and in 1938 by the National Park Service, who now owns and maintains the house and grounds. It is weathertight and heated.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The two-and-a-half-story building is approximately 44' x 28' with a 24' x 22' ell, forming a T-shape.
2. Foundations: Granite underpinning. Central row of brick piers and brick vaults to support fireplace masses.
3. Walls: Brick walls are laid in a Flemish bond. Interior partitions are board, plastered on both sides (total thickness approximately 3"). Common-bond brick on ell, with a header course every eighth row. Example of original brickwork preserved in attic of ell where it joined house.
4. Structural systems: Brick walls are load-bearing.
5. Chimneys: East and west ends each have two brick chimneys flush with the face of the outside wall, with a short brick parapet topped with a stone coping running between. Brick chimney in center of north end of ell.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Central doorway has a wooden ten-panel door, with wood frame and frontispiece consisting of flat pilasters and denticulated pediment. Transom window has five lights. Wooden doorway on north end of ell has been added since 1938. Original doorway in rear bricked up when ell added.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Wooden double-hung sash with twelve-over-twelve lights restored in 1928. Brick relieving arch over opening with brick tympanum. No shutters.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gambrel roof with slates on lower slopes and copper sheeting on upper slopes, dating from a re-roofing in 1954. Original roofing material unknown. Slate roof on ell. Slate has 7" x 9" exposed.
- b. Cornice: Wooden modillioned cornice.
- c. Dormers: Three dormers on front, the center one segmentally arched (restored in 1938), flanked by pedimented gable dormers. Two shed-roofed dormers on rear.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: Central-hall plan, four rooms on each floor, stairways back to back in center hall. Third-floor caretaker's apartment consisting of four rooms and bath apparently similar to original room arrangement.
2. Stairways: Front stair of wood has carved interlocking spiral newel post and three different repeating spiral balusters. Rear stair restored in 1939.
3. Flooring: Wide random-width pine boards. Floors in southeast and southwest first-floor rooms are original. Others restored in 1939. Basement floor is concrete under main house and dirt under ell.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are plaster on wood lath. Extensive beveled wood paneling on first and second floors, particularly fireplace walls. Wallpaper, a 1941 copy of a China tea box design found on wall, in second-floor northwest room.
5. Doorways: Wood frames and paneled doors. Beveled panel design and number of panels determined by wainscot design of each room.
6. Trim: Extensive trim entirely of wood including baseboards, door and window frames, and ceilings. Southeast and northeast rooms of first floor and southeast room of second floor have continuous cornice with slightly recessed cove.
7. Hardware: Brass, dating from 1940.
8. Lighting: No lighting fixtures in main rooms on first and second floors. Incandescent lantern-type fixtures in stair halls. Incandescent ceiling pull-chain fixtures in ell and basement. Third floor has floor lamps from wall outlets.

9. Heating: Central heating plant in Custom House two doors away. Radiators concealed in backs of closets.

D. Site

1. General setting: Part of Salem Maritime National Historic Site with Hawkes House to west. Open on south to Derby Street and beyond to old Derby Wharf (restored with no buildings).
2. Landscape: Wooden fence with granite base in front. Board fence on east and north and wooden picket fence on west. Brick walk from sidewalk to front door, gravel walk in rear.
3. Outbuildings: Rum shop moved to northeast corner of site in 1938.

Prepared by: John P. Shaw
Architect
September, 1958

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